

BRAZOS VALLEY

OCTOBER 2020

INSIDE



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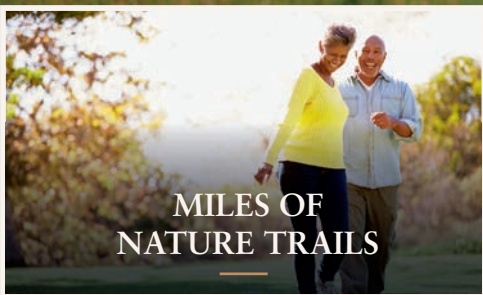
AllenHonda.com



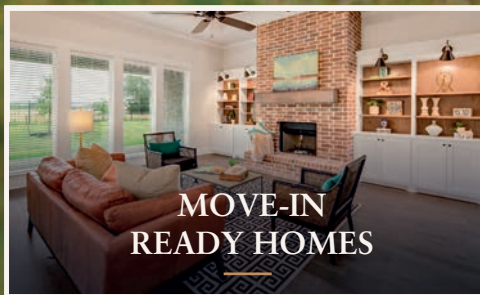
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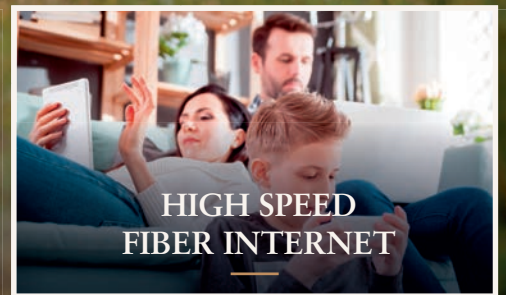
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Meditation and Mindfulness

Being Present
By Khadeeja Umana
Page 32

Senior Health Checklist

Staying Healthy this Fall Made Easier
Page 34

Money Matters

Slow and Steady Wins the Investment Race
Courtesy of Extraco Banks
Page 38

Healthy Aging

Pandemic Best Practices for Senior Adults
By Lauren Rouse
Page 39

Second Annual Brazos Valley Gives

Give Where You Live
By Katie James
Page 42

FACETS

Families Engaged Together for Support
By Khadeeja Umana
Page 45

Cover Credits: The Texas Arts and Music Festival

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HEALTH AND WELLNESS

SPECIAL ADVERTISING FEATURES

Legacy Nursing & Rehabilitation

Where the Legacy of Life Matters
Advertorial courtesy of Legacy Nursing & Rehabilitation
Page 6

Baylor, Scott & White

We Each Need To Do Our Part
Advertorial courtesy of Baylor, Scott & White
Page 10

Cashion Dental

No Dental Insurance? No Problem!
Advertorial courtesy of Cashion Dental
Page 12

CHI St. Joseph Health

Here, Always.
Advertorial courtesy of CHI St. Joseph Health
Page 14

The Huntington at College Station

Your Life, Better Living.
Advertorial courtesy of The Huntington
Page 18

Reece & Jouett Radiant Exceptional Dentistry

Concerned About Coronavirus? Your Teeth Tell the Story.
Advertorial courtesy of Dr. Reece and Dr. Jouett
Page 20

Cancer Clinic

World Class Community Cancer Doctors
Advertorial courtesy of Cancer Clinic
Page 23

Comfort Keepers

In-Home Care
Advertorial courtesy of Comfort Keepers
Page 24

Senior Helpers

Providing The Peace of Mind You Need
Advertorial courtesy of Senior Helpers
Page 39

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LEGACY NURSING & REHABILITATION

Where the Legacy of Life Matters

Legacy Management Group is excited to join the Brazos Valley community and begin operating in Bryan College Station. Legacy recently acquired Generations Center for Senior Living located in Bryan.

Legacy Management Group is an established health care provider with the owners having more than 40 years of experience in skilled nursing. They have spent most of their lives working in many areas of long-term care, including administration, consulting, operations, and ownership, all the while developing a vast experience to rely upon.

CEO Devin Gum says, "Generations was the perfect addition to our corporate family, as a highly successful and established facility. We are thrilled to be a part of the expanding Bryan College Station community and look forward to a long and prosperous future here in central Texas."

Legacy currently operates several nursing facilities across Louisiana and Texas.

Legacy plans to build on the foundation established by Generations to provide exceptional, compassionate care in the Brazos Valley. Their years of experience in the industry allow them to assist

families during the difficult process of selecting someone to entrust with the care of your loved one.

The facility offers varying levels of care to residents based on their individual needs for long-term care, skilled nursing, therapy, or rehabilitation. A comfortable home-like environment, an intensive therapy and rehabilitation team, and peaceful respite care are all provided under one roof. Specialty services, including IV therapy, wound care, respiratory therapy, and cardiac rehab, are also available for residents.

Large, spacious rooms ensure a comfortable stay for each resident. A full range of services, including

meals, snacks, activities, laundry, housekeeping, and transportation, are all available for residents to utilize.

For more information or to schedule a tour, call (979) 776-7521 or email bryanadmissions@legacynursingrehab.com.





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- Specialty services including IV therapy, wound care, respiratory therapy and cardiac rehab.
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Why Choose Legacy?



Combining Legacy's more than 40 years of healthcare industry experience with the foundation and reputation of Generations, we are proud to offer exceptional, compassionate care in the Brazos Valley. Our dedicated staff is committed to meeting the needs of our residents at every level. Legacy Nursing and Rehabilitation, "Where the Legacy of Life Matters."

If you would like more information, want to schedule a visit, or have additional questions, please contact us.

We look forward to helping you any way that we can.

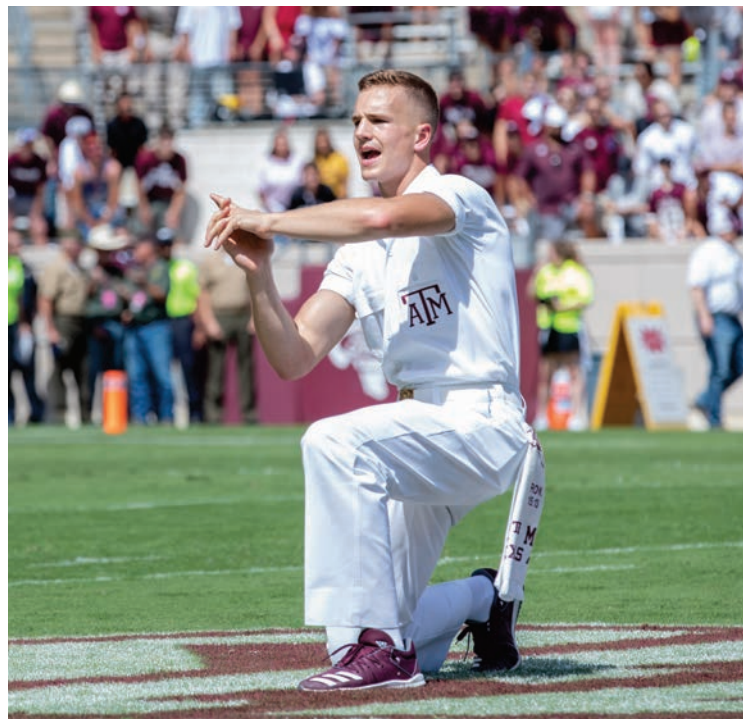
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BEHIND THE TWELFTH MAN TOWEL

A&M's Head Yell Leader Pursuing a Music Career

By MADI TELSCHOW



The role of head yell leader at Texas A&M University is not one that has ever been taken lightly. Yet, while this year's head yell leader, Keller Cox, has both feet firmly planted in his role, his mind is dreaming of bigger things: music.

Ever since he first picked up the guitar in eighth grade, Cox says that he always had a "thing" for music; he was always singing and playing. Although Cox says his comfort zone was leading worship in high school, his dad was persistent in requesting campfire-style concerts, and he began keeping songs on hand to play. Over the years, he says he began to enjoy playing for an audience. However, it was not until college that Cox found his true love: Texas Country Music.

Cox says, although he grew up listening to country music, the subset of "Texas Country"

was one that appealed to him on an emotional level.

"Texas Country tells more of a story," Cox explains. "It's about heartbreak, and it's very different from normal, Nashville-style country, different from nationwide country music."

Discovering this passion led to songwriting of his own. Centering his melodies around personal feelings of what life is, was, and ought to be, Cox says his music is meant to drive his audience to feel the emotion behind the lyrics and allow them to know him on a deeper level.

"It's never just a generic song," says Cox. "I put myself out there. There's an emotion, and I start singing."

Although he only began writing music in the summer of 2019, Cox says that the overwhelmingly positive response has encouraged him to consider writing and performing for a living.

"With quarantine, there was more time dropped in my lap to dream," says Cox. "I reached out to the guy who first recorded Parker McCollum to record an EP, and he said yes. That whole experience [in the studio] was a complete learning curve — a complete maturing of my musical ability and the way I listen to music."

Although the fall has since busied his schedule with additional yell leader responsibilities and classes, Cox says he still finds ways to make time for his music and songwriting.

"I'll record a melody on my phone and then go back to a guitar and see what it could really look like — because your mind isn't really confined by six strings," Cox explains. "I've written on the way to class, stopping in uniform to record something on my phone or make a note real quick."

The yell leader confesses that his duties somewhat restrict him from performing and playing shows, but he is nevertheless determined to promote his craft and execute a plan in the long term.

"I'm going to release my songs spaced out ... Oct. 1 [was] my first single, then probably Nov. 1, January, and the rest of the EP at the end of spring," Cox announced. "I'll be going back in the studio at least two more times next year, one time in the spring and then one in the fall — for a full album or an EP, whatever needs to be done."

Fortunately, Cox says he is taking an extra year to complete his schooling, graduating with a construction science degree in May of 2022.

"My goal is to stay present as a yell leader," Cox says, "but at the same time, it's exciting to know that there's something else beyond my time at A&M." *i*

5 ACTIONS TO PREVENT DROWNING

- 1** Assign an adult water guardian to constantly watch children around water. Stay in arms reach.
- 2** Learn to float. Learn basic swimming skills. Never swim alone.
- 3** Wear U.S. Coast Guard approved life jackets in and around open water, on docks and on boats.
- 4** Block access to water. Ensure multiple barriers are in place.
- 5** Learn CPR. Refresh your skills every year.



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Dear Friend,

Did you know **DROWNING** is the #1 cause of unintentional injury related death for children under 5, and a leading cause for children 14 and under?

Neither did we, until we lost our 4-year-old daughter, Emma Grace, to a drowning at a resort hotel on vacation. She had some swimming ability; but, that day, she left the child's supervised activity center and gained access to the pool area without anyone knowing.

Emma Grace drowned, quickly and silently.

That spring break changed our lives forever. We started Emma's Project, a non-profit organization, to help spread the word that drowning is preventable and to offer life vests to help prevent drownings as well.

Our goal this year is 500 life vests to distribute to the Brazos Valley aquatic centers and to build life vest donar stations at Lake Bryan and Lake Somerville.

Sincerely,

Michael and Jennifer Hojnacki



Emma Grace Hojnacki

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We Each Need To Do Our Part.

**Alejandro C. Arroliga,
M.D., MSc., FCCP, FACP**

**Dr. Arroliga is the system
chief medical officer of Baylor
Scott & White Health**

For seven months, SARS CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, has paralyzed a defenseless world and caused hundreds of thousands of deaths worldwide.

At Baylor Scott & White Health, our teams are racing against the clock to explore the safety and effectiveness of therapies you hear about on the news, and we currently have more than 25 clinical research trials, including experimental therapies designed for those treating COVID-19 outside the hospital.

While we work at a safely accelerated pace to move these vaccines and therapies from research trials into everyday use, I implore you:

Protect yourselves. Protect your family. Protect your neighbors.

For this pandemic, we already know what works:

Hand hygiene: We need to provide leadership, continue education, and make changes to our environment to make it easier for people to clean their hands at places of work, at the supermarket, etc.

Physical distancing: We must make it easier for people to work from home, convince the public not to go out unnecessarily, and reduce major events, such as concerts.

Face masks: Masks will reduce the transmission of the virus and are critical when physical distancing is not possible.

We, the people, will need to implement an adaptive response that requires changes in values and attitudes. These adaptive changes need to be local — in our own communities with local leadership.

To fight this pandemic, we will need to rely on each other. As a community member, you can model this behavior and provide local leadership. We each need to do our part.

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When we detected a problem with Kay's heart through medical tests, we helped her find the right solution. She received TAVR, a minimally invasive alternative to open heart surgery. She was out of the hospital and back home the next day.

Learn more at [BSWHealth.com/CSTAVR](https://www.bswhealth.com/CSTAVR).

Local artist Giovanni Valeras was inspired by Kay's warm-hearted connection to family, using reclaimed wood to tell the story of her new life.



Baylor Scott & White
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CASHION DENTAL

No Dental Insurance? No Problem!

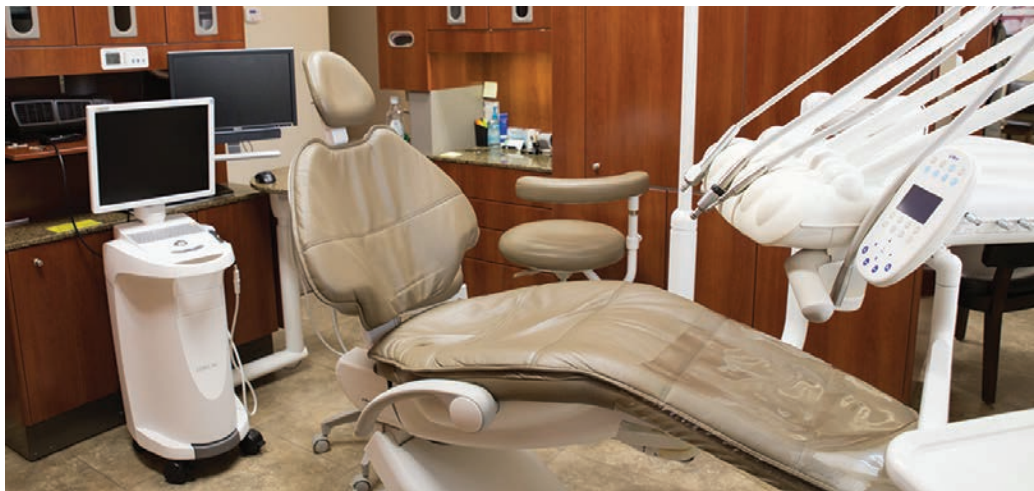
You asked, Cashion Dental listened! Many of their patients are without dental insurance and have asked what can be recommend as a helpful and affordable payment plan. After much research and review, they are excited to offer their own membership plan. This new program is called "Plan for Health," Cashion Dental's own in-house dental service plan. Plan for Health is perfect for patients without insurance or patients expected to reach their annual maximum benefit coverage. Plan for Health allows Cashion Dental to reward loyal patients for keeping their dental health a priority. If this is something that might interest you, give Cashion Dental a call!

Dr. Cashion is committed to staying on the cutting edge of dental technology. He uses digital x-rays including 3D imaging, digital impressions, digital cavity detection, and intraoral cameras. He also uses the current technology to provide his patients with same-day crowns, having them in and out in less than two hours! And because dental implants are the new standard of care for tooth replacement, he has trained and places dental implants in his very own office — no need to go somewhere else.

Cashion Dental is also the only practice in the Brazos Valley to offer the new Solea dental laser that is virtually noise-free and allows procedures to be performed quickly, without any anesthesia.

The team is determined to provide top-quality, gentle, and efficient dental care in a pleasant environment.

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When it comes to choosing a health care provider for you and your loved ones, CHI St. Joseph Health has been the Brazos Valley's leader in providing trusted, quality health care when it matters most. Part of CommonSpirit Health, the largest Catholic health care system in the United States, CHI St. Joseph Health is committed to improving the health of the people they serve.

Their expansive network is comprised of five hospitals including CHI St. Joseph Health Regional Hospital in Bryan; College Station Hospital, formerly College Station Medical Center; Madison Hospital; Grimes Hospital; and Burleson Hospital. It also includes two long-term care facilities, an assisted living facility, and multiple clinics conveniently located across the Brazos Valley.

CHI St. Joseph Health is proud to be the Brazos Valley's leader in emergency and trauma services, having received the first designation as an accredited Chest Pain Center and the first as a Primary Stroke Center in the region. They remain the first and only Joint Commission-certified Heart Failure Program and Gold-awarded American Heart Association — Get with the Guidelines program in the seven-county area. The regional hospital in Bryan is home to the only level II Emergency and Trauma Center in the Brazos Valley, the highest in the region. With the most comprehensive availability of specialists in the region, they provide diagnoses and immediate treatment of life-threatening injuries seven days a week and are equipped to handle even the most serious cases. Additionally, they are home to the only air and ground EMS service in the Brazos Valley, and they are also home to several Centers of Excellence including Texas A&M University Primary Care Network, Neurosciences, Obstetrics, Orthopedics, Oncology, and Cardiology.

For more information, visit CHIStJosephHealth.org.



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Learn more about our definition of humanity in cancer care at CHISJoseph.org/Oncology.



KATHI APPELT: *A Story Waiting to be Written*

Story by **ALIX POTH** | Photos by **MICHAEL KELLETT**

When you walk into the Appelt home, you're met by five friendly felines, an aroma of freshly brewed coffee, purple walls, cheetah print carpet, and shelves upon shelves of books. In other words, you find the perfect abode for an award-winning children's book author.

It's fitting that Kathi Appelt lives in such an inviting home, as she is well-known for her hospitality. With an offer of homemade cookies, it quickly becomes apparent that Kathi's home and hospitality are not simply for show — they help tell her story.

Kathi became a first-generation college student when she studied at Texas A&M University. Kathi began with hopes to become a veterinarian but says she quickly found her mind was not wired for the hard sciences. However, she was enthralled by the freshman English course she was required to take. She switched her major to English before her second semester of college.



"I didn't have a clue what I would do with an English degree, but it felt right for me to be in the English department," she shares. "The liberal arts courses I took taught me how to think — how to take a material and bring my own sensibilities and stories to it, and then come to a thoughtful conclusion."

A few years after graduation, Kathi married Ken Appelt, son of one of Texas A&M's community pillars Les Appelt '41, and they settled down as College Station

locals, had two sons, and were suddenly tossed into the world of parenthood.

"I started reading to my boys a lot, sort of as a self-defense, thinking that it certainly couldn't hurt," Kathi says. "I discovered the world of children's books through them, and I was enchanted."

Kathi describes her sons' childhood years in the 1980s as the "golden age of children's books" and marks herself as a beneficiary of that period of wonder. During this time, she grabbed lunch with her friend and former professor, Elizabeth Neeld, who happened to be an English professor of children's literature. When Neeld asked what she was reading, Kathi laughingly responded that children's books were her current literature of choice.

"Elizabeth looked at me and asked seriously if I had ever thought of writing children's books, to which I responded

[continued on page 25]



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**Brierra Colvin, LMSW
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Above & Beyond Grief Support

THE HUNTINGTON AT COLLEGE STATION

Your Life, Better Living

In the heart of growing College Station, a new type of apartment living community is now welcoming residents aged 62+ to affordable independence. The Huntington at College Station provides the perfect balance of comfort and convenience while situated in a beautiful natural setting.

Residents at The Huntington have fantastic access to the city of College Station and beyond. Located at 800 Durham Loop, it provides direct access to Baylor Scott & White Medical Center and is adjacent to Midtown City Center, the new mixed-use development in the center of College Station. Catch up with friends over coffee in the community room before heading out to run errands — shopping, banking, health care, places of worship, and more — all within a few blocks.

In addition to the accessible location, The Huntington has plenty of on-site features to keep residents entertained. The clubhouse offers social events, a library, an arts and crafts area, a community room, and a fitness center. If residents desire outdoor activities, they can

enjoy a putting green, pickleball court, bocce ball, or a life-size chessboard. They can even take time to enjoy a walk and savor the natural beauty of the lush landscaping.

Each of the one- or two-bedroom apartment units consists of spacious living areas and full kitchens complete with a Whirlpool appliance package. Other unit features include vinyl plank flooring in main living

areas, carpeted bedrooms, faux wood blinds, and washer/dryer connections. With various floor plans and configurations, residents will choose precisely the type of apartment home they prefer.

The Huntington at College Station is looking forward to better living for seniors in the Brazos Valley. Speak with their friendly leasing staff by calling (979) 571-9224 or visit huntingtonatcs.com.





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The pressures of dealing with COVID-19 prevention can bring on unique health issues. Dentists are seeing more patients with headaches, fractured teeth, jaw pain (TMJ/TMD), and sleep problems. With that in mind, let's catch up on three things about your teeth and your health.

1. Your oral health is directly tied to your overall health.

2. Ignoring your dental health, due to fear or neglect, can affect your career, your social life, and your overall happiness, which can lead to stress.

3. Modern dentistry has moved far beyond 'drilling and filling' to become a neuromuscular based science that has conquered dental pain, reduced anxiety, and successfully turned back the clock on dental health. What can you do to reduce stress and maintain your dental health?

Dr. Reece and Dr. Jouett recommend the following:

- Get regular dental checkups to catch things before they get worse.
- Get a dental night guard and one to wear during the day too.



DR. MICHAEL K. REECE, LVIM, FICOI



DR. RYAN M. JOUETT, LVIF, FICOI

- Maintain good posture: Don't sit on the couch or bed slumped over your laptop — this leads to muscle stress which translates into teeth grinding, a poor bite, and poor sleep.

- Get good sleep. Stress, tension and poor posture can lead to poor sleep, and poor sleep can lead to depression and underperformance.

- Keep moving. Alternate between sitting and standing often.

- Focus on your breathing. This simple act stimulates the vagus nerve and in turn the

parasympathetic nervous system, which lowers your blood pressure, telling your body to relax and calm down.

Dr. Michael K. Reece, DDS, LVIM, FICOI and Dr. Ryan M. Jouett, LVIM, FICOI of Reece & Jouett Radiant Exceptional Dentistry are specially trained in the field of Physiologic Dentistry. Each of the doctors are LVI Master dentists, making them the only dental office in the world with two LVI Master dentists in the same practice.

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The Story of the Sandbar Art Studio

By **MADI TELSCHOW**

What began as a student looking for ways to fund her college education has now blossomed into a popular online art platform that brings awareness and recognition to smaller artists.

Adalea Howell, a resident of Bryan College Station, says she never planned to make a career in art but found herself selling artwork on eBay to make money. When one of her clients turned out to be a nationally renowned arts and entertainment lawyer, this opened the door for larger art commissions. In turn, this led her to the idea of creating the sharing and buying platform now known as The Sandbar Art Studio, affording small artists opportunity for exposure.

"You can be the best artist in the world, but if you don't have anyone to look at it, it doesn't matter," Howell says. "Vice versa: you can be an 'okay' artist, but if you have everyone looking at you,

someone's going to like it and someone's going to buy it."

However, the true impetus for her platform's establishment came when Howell connected over social media with her now-partnering artist, Kevork Kestkjian, whom she affectionately refers to as "Koko," towards the beginning of this past summer.

"Once I met Koko, I started talking with him and realized, 'You live in Canada, and I am able to see your work, and you're able to see mine and support it,'" Howell says. "From there, we had the idea of creating a space for everybody else to do the same thing. Right now, we're doing it all online until I get a physical studio, but doing it online has allowed me to reach not only locally but everywhere else."

With submissions flooding in daily from across the globe, Howell's site has

quickly gained traction and accumulated a regular following of 2,000 people per week. Even celebrities are beginning to turn their heads: the studio's upcoming Halloween competition, *Afraid of the Art*, features Emily Roeske from *Halloweentown* as a guest judge.

In addition to seasonal competitions, Howell says she has made it a goal to amplify the reach of smaller artists and showcase their work as much as possible. Each week, a spotlight artist is chosen to be featured on the website's home page, and art is consistently available to be purchased under the "Shop Art" tab.

"We accept all mediums of art, but we judge [submissions] on the exact

[continued on page 24]



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L to R: DR. TERRY JENKINS, M.D., DR. MARK FLOYD, M.D., DR. ERIN FLEENER, M.D., DR. KUMUD TRIPATHY, M.D.

challenges.

The Cancer Clinic has also recently expanded to better serve its patients, now with two convenient locations: the original Bryan location at 2215 E. Villa Maria Rd., Suite 110, and their newest location inside the Medical Arts Building at 1721 Birmingham Rd., Suite 204, College Station.

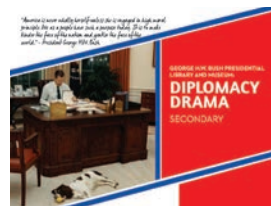
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same criteria: does it reflect originality/creativity; does it reflect your own personal style; how well is it done?" Howell explains. "Art is so subjective; so many people like so many different things."

This subjectivity of art is not only a concept Howell recognizes but one she also teaches in her award-winning art lessons.

"I always first start off by telling everyone, whether they choose me as an instructor or not, 'Choose somebody that you admire their work,' so they can come to find their own style in the process," says Howell. "From there, I will go on to get to know them: what they are trying to do with their art or if they are trying to work on a certain thing about themselves."



Although maintaining The Sandbar Art Studio and conducting lessons occupies much of her time, Howell says she consistently sets aside time to explore her own style and build her own brand as an acrylic artist.

"Personally, I love the human form — I think the lines are so fun and it varies all across the board," Howell explains. "I am very much so inspired by the human vigor. Ultimately, in each painting, I would say that the main focus is either a person going through something or representing a specific time period."

Moving forward, Howell says she continues to take on projects from individuals around the world, including the band Ballyhoo!, entertainment lawyer Kirk Schroeder, and actress Kimberly J. Brown. All money received for her art continues to fund her degree in special education, while she also plans to get her therapy license, in hopes that she will be able to begin offering art therapy lessons through The Sandbar Art Studio. *i*

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'no,'" Kathi says. "She asked me, 'Why not?' Considering my love for children's literature, I didn't have an answer to that!"

As a children's book author, Kathi aims to keep her younger audience in mind, remembering the voracious reader she was as a child. She also draws inspiration from life happening right around her.

"Most of my books and poems come directly from my own life because that's what I know best and feel most strongly about," she says.

But Kathi is also honest about what it takes to be an author; even with dozens of published books, she knows it's a challenging process. Her first book purchased by an editor was never published. Her first published book, *Elephants Aloft*, was written two years before it was illustrated and released into the world.

"I would send manuscripts in the mail and would have to wait six months to a year to hear back about it, so I'd just move on to the next story," she says. "One picture book bounced around and took 17 years before anything happened.



THE REST WAS A STORY WAITING TO BE WRITTEN.

Every book has its own journey and history."

The hard work Kathi has put into her stories has paid off. She's published close to 50 books and has won numerous awards. She notes the awards she received for her first novel, the National Book Award Finalist and Newbery Honor Book distinction given to *The Underneath*, felt most significant.

"I got stuck with the plot of *The Underneath* and had to make myself keep writing it in small significant scenes, so it was great to be rewarded for that," she says.

Even after such a notable career, Kathi shows little sign of stopping. A teacher at heart, she spent a few years teaching an upper-level course on writing for children at Texas A&M. Today, she continues teaching in the Master of Fine Arts writing program at Vermont College of Fine Arts.

Nestled into their cozy and colorful College Station cottage, Kathi and Ken remain passionate about the arts and humanities in their everyday lives. After all, Kathi is a writer, Ken is in a band, and their sons are jazz musicians!

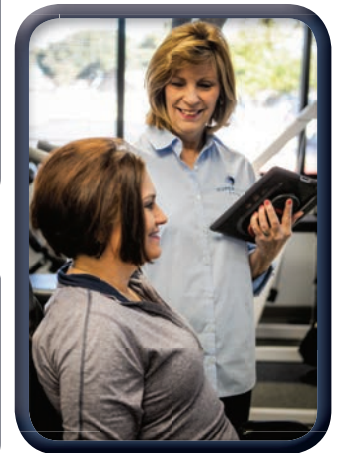
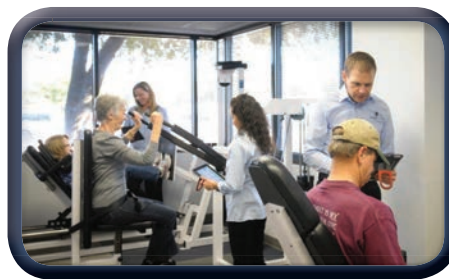
"The liberal arts has a human core. We are storytellers because we ourselves are stories," she says. "I think it's something we've really lost sight of ... Liberal arts is the study of our human story, which teaches us listening, contemplating, and looking underneath the human experience." *i*



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KEEP GOING, KEEP GROWING

2020 Texas Arts and Music Festival

Story by **KHADEEJA UMANA** | Photos by **NATALIE LANGE**



With live music and colored streets, the annual Texas Arts and Music Festival is hoping to draw in spectators that need an uplifting and inspiring weekend Oct. 16 through 18 in downtown Brenham.

The art village, an outdoor market, will feature artists from throughout the state of Texas on Saturday, Oct. 17. The market will have double the spacing between booths for precautionary purposes and only up to 30 vendors, which is a lower capacity in comparison to previous years, says founder and Chairman Brad Stufflebeam.

Live music is also being provided by the city of Brenham, Stufflebeam says, with the band Texas Unlimited playing that Friday and Escape, a Journey cover band, playing that Saturday. The city is going to be managing social distancing during the concert, he says.

"Both of our featured artists will be doing live mural installations, and it's

going to be a very positive and uplifting message," Stufflebeam says. "We're excited about both of these murals, and we'd like to leave it as a surprise as much as possible because that's the excitement of seeing them created over the space of three days."

Like previous years, the Texas Arts and Music Festival will support art scholarships for local school systems and produce two new mural installations in downtown Brenham.

"I am excited to create a mural that connects with the residents in that part of Texas, something that speaks to what life is like in that area," featured artist Luis Angulo says. "I love creating art that is not just about the artist, but it's also about what context it is taken in as it depicts the surrounding environment."

Angulo says growing up in Venezuela as a child, his heritage plays a large role in his art. As an immigrant, he says he has been able to work on projects where





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his art resonates with his culture and other members of the Latinx community.

“My identity is a big part of my work,” Angulo says, “Austin plays a very important part in my artistic journey because when I first got here, I didn’t know what to do as far as art goes. I didn’t realize there were several muralists that were working full time in Austin and continued getting projects. I then saw an opportunity for me there.”

Featured artist Tara Johnston says her identity as a Texan played an important role in her artwork at the beginning of her career as she pulled from the aesthetic of the natural environment in Texas.

“My inspiration comes from a lot of personal memories; growing up, my mom loved tending to her gardens,” Johnston says. “She used to plant a lot of flowers. Every weekend, that’s what she was doing — she was out in the flower beds.”

Johnston says she was asked to be in the festival in the first months of COVID-19 pandemic. In that time, she was reflecting on what the future looked like for her and everyone.

“I’m a lettering artist so I always try to convey some kind of message of hope or positivity in my work,” Johnston says. “I came up with the idea of *Keep Growing* for my mural because, for me, I really needed to have that reminder daily that life hasn’t stopped. We need to keep learning, we need to keep pushing, and keep growing in whatever capacity we can right now so that when we come out on the other side of this, we’re just ready to take on the world.”

For more information about the 2020 Texas Arts and Music Festival, visit texasartsandmusicfestival.com. **i**





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LIVING WORKS OF ART

Succulents a Lasting Trend in Home Decor

By MADI TELSCHOW



Succulents have become an increasingly trendy item to showcase. However, given the recent pandemic, it seems that these thick, water-storing plants may be here to stay.

When shelter in place began in March, thousands of Bryan College Station residents were suddenly homebound, left with little to occupy their free time. Hobbies were restricted to that which could be accomplished within their own four walls and the yard outside them. For many, this became the deciding factor to adopt succulents.

Megan Bush, a junior at Texas A&M University, says this was the case for her, though her mother always had a garden.

"I got my first two plants in May for [my mom] and I to have something to do together," says Bush. "As time has gone on, I brought my plants with me back to College Station. I try to quarantine as much as possible, so it's been something to have at home."

Laura Dunn, a fifth-year Texas A&M student, says succulents became her reason to get out of bed. Although she struggles with mental illness, these plants have created a daily routine and sense of purpose essential for her overall health.

"Being out in the sunshine and taking care of something was so good for my mental health," says Dunn about potting her plants. "Especially being quarantined, you don't go outside a lot. You don't realize how little you've seen the sun. Just that

little act of sweating and being in the sunshine and getting your hands in the dirt is therapeutic."

Dunn says, although she was reluctant to care for a living thing that could not give her direct feedback, she found most varieties of succulent plants required very little maintenance.

"Succulents teach you a lot about moderation," says Dunn. "If you don't give them enough, they respond poorly, but they also respond poorly if you overwater them. It teaches you about self-discipline and allows you to understand that giving too much isn't necessarily better."

Fallon Crocker, founder and owner of local succulent nursery Succs N Such, corroborates this sentiment, emphasizing how easy it is to grow succulents without a green thumb.

"I think that is a big part of the reason we're seeing such a growth in the succulent industry: you don't have to be someone that's good with all plants to keep these alive," jokes Crocker. "They're perfect for people like me that kill other plants from lack of attention."

Crocker holds firmly that succulents are more than a temporary fad, if for no other reason than the element of greenery and domesticity they add to otherwise dark and dull spaces.

"Seven years later, I still derive the same joy from them as I did then, and I see that with a lot of other people," says Crocker. "For me, personally, what has

been so fun is making the arrangements. I don't know which addiction is worse: the succulents or the decorative pots that I put them in ... I call them living works of art."

When Texas A&M student organization Aggie Replant hosted a succulent sale fundraiser on campus — featuring Succs N Such products — in March of 2019, they were overwhelmed by the response they received.

"I was surprised how many guys and girls wanted to get a succulent," says Rob Cook, former Replant associate director and treasurer. "I thought it was a good idea; I didn't know it was going to be that good. We sold out every day and had to have [Crocker] bring more inventory halfway through each day."

Crocker says, although COVID-19 policies restrict another on-campus fundraiser this year, she is excited for a continued partnership with Replant, providing the opportunity for more people to buy plants of their own.

Until then, Bush recommends that, in addition to Succs N Such's north Bryan location, The Farm Patch Market in Bryan is a great place for those interested to begin building their succulent collection.

"It seems intimidating at first, but there are so many good resources online. There are even apps you can get to help take care of your plants," says Bush. "It's honestly a lot easier than I expected, so I recommend it." *i*

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MEDITATION AND MINDFULNESS

Being Present

By **KHADEEJA UMANA**



This past year, as people spend more time at home and in close quarters with family, friends, or roommates, they have been exploring ways to better themselves and their way of life. Meditation and mindfulness are two approaches that have become popular practices for many.

Mindful living is being fully present in the moment, accepting your surroundings, and living without judgement, says Texas A&M University Extension Program Specialist Dr. Sumathi Venkatesh. Dr. Venkatesh helped develop the supplemental material for the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Mindful Living Program.

"The Mindful Living Program and a few other programs that we have developed for Texas A&M AgriLife Extension are based on having healthy relationships," Venkatesh says. "We have information on parenting and increasing productivity. Some focus on being more digitally aware and focus on learning how to minimize your use of digital products."

There is a good understanding that mindful living connects to meditation, Venkatesh says.

"It's not necessary, however; you can still practice mindfulness with or without meditation," says Venkatesh. "You can journal to incorporate mindfulness; if you're religious, you can use a prayer; or if you are into the arts, you can use creative work to practice. Meditation is

a huge aspect, but you can also practice mindfulness in other ways as well."

Meditation gives you the opportunity to be more authentic and natural wherever you are, says SKY@TAMU President Rishabh Singla.

SKY@TAMU offers the SKY Campus Happiness Retreat where participants develop a daily evidence-based breathwork and meditation practice, gain stress-management and leadership skills, develop strategies for social connection, and engage in peer-driven service initiatives.

"SKY rhythmic breathing leads to meditation easily," Singla says. "Some people may say meditation is focusing on something, but what I feel meditation is — is totally letting go and being in the moment. I will say, however, concentration, focus, and clarity of the mind are the outcomes of meditation."

To improve mental health and wellbeing, SKY breathing practice is one of the tools to go deeper in meditation, says Singla.

"A well-ventilated room [and] cleaner surroundings are suggested," he says. "To go deeper into experience, have a sense of sacredness when you are practicing breathwork and meditation. Don't feel shy letting your friends, family, or roommates know when you meditate, and request them not to disturb you because this is a person's time to relax and rejuvenate."

No matter how busy you are in your life, if you set a time once a day for meditation practices, it allows you to have deeper relationship with yourself and the world around you, Singla says.

"When energy is low in our system, depression, anxiety, and many negative emotions arise in us, so if we learn how to keep our energy high and sustain it, we can effectively reduce these negative emotions," Singla says. "Here, breathing exercises can become powerful and [the] easiest tool to energize; reduce stress, anxiety, and depression; and boost immunity."

Linda Didsbury, a local instructor for Heartfulness meditation, says virtual meditation classes have pros and cons.

"One of the cons, of course, is as people are starting to meditate, they found it's more helpful to have other people that they can see and be with," Didsbury says. "But if they close their eyes then there's really just our minds to work with, and so it's the only con that maybe people new to meditation might struggle with a little more."

Virtual classes may allow you to not be as easily distracted and have the convenience of giving you space where perhaps you are the most comfortable, says Didsbury.

"Meditation is a skill, and it develops over time," Didsbury says. "The key to mastering it is repetition, so as we continue a daily practice, we see the benefits." *i*

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SENIOR HEALTH CHECKLIST

Staying Healthy this Fall Made Easier



STEP 1: NUTRITION CHECKUP

You are What You Eat

By **KATEN ADAMS**

Nutrition plays a significant role in day-to-day life, and as we age, the keys to health are to prioritize and to simplify.

“Every day our bodies are changing,” says Keri Carpenter RDN, LDN. Based on how bodies change, adjustments can prepare everyone for older years through healthy living, says Carpenter, a project manager for the Center for Population Health and Aging at Texas A&M University.

“Convenient food is convenient, and especially when we are going out to eat and getting packaged food in the stores, they are an easy solution,” says Carpenter. “We are fighting the ease and convenience, which [is] packed with salt, fat, and sugar that might not set us up for success.”

Seasonal weather changes also can affect what produce is available and that plays a role in nutritional balance. People may need to adjust Vitamin D intake from sources like the sun during the colder months, explains Carpenter, and folks might have to get creative with nutritional solutions this time of year.

“You can like food without being restricted,” adds Carpenter. “Take a look at somebody’s plate, look at their traditions, and modify it to have more nutrition,” explains Carpenter. The key to success starts on the plate by increasing the serving sizes of non-starchy vegetables and adding protein and healthy fat, while reducing — but not eliminating — portions

It’s never too late to try to imagine what your budget is and to see how you might live within your means.

—Marcia Ory, Ph.D., MPH
Founding director of the Texas A&M
Health Center for Population Health and Aging

of favorite starchy vegetables or other carbs.

Balance is especially important for those in the 70+ demographic, with hydration a sometimes-overlooked component of nutrition, Carpenter says. Lack of hydration can cause dizziness resulting in falls, which can lead to bigger problems, she notes. Another key is to take in adequate protein to prevent muscle loss.

For those ages 50 to 60, nutrition is centered around chronic disease prevention, diabetes prevention, and creating a healthy diet, explains Carpenter. For the 70+ years, the focus shifts to foods that are exciting, what individuals like and do not like, and creating good nutrition solutions as needed. To make foods easier to eat for anyone with difficulty chewing, options include blending, boiling, and shredding firm or tough foods like meat proteins to help keep older adults eating enough for good nutrition, adds Carpenter.

Good resources for easy-to-follow, accurate nutrition information include the American Diabetes Association, American Heart Association, and myplate.org, says Carpenter.

STEP 2: VACCINES FOR LIFE

You Heard it Flu the Grapevine

By **RILEY FARRELL**

Everyone age 50 and older is part of the vulnerable population as the COVID-19 pandemic continues and influenza season begins. Experts from the Texas A&M Health Center for Population Health & Aging recommend everyone get a flu shot this year — and the sooner the better for prevention.

Fall and colder weather mean the dangerous co-existence of influenza and the novel coronavirus, both contagious respiratory illnesses, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It is possible to contract flu and COVID-19 simultaneously, a looming double-threat that could harm your immune system in unprecedented ways, says Wendy Creighton, a registered nurse at the center.

“For vulnerable populations, we don’t know what having both the flu and COVID-19 will look like, because we haven’t been in this situation before,” says Creighton. “But you should get the flu vaccine this year with COVID-19. Especially if you are at risk by being older, having diabetes, or having heart or lung disease.”

The optimal timeline for getting a flu vaccination is the same this year as past years, and Creighton says she wants to underscore the timeline for folks above the age of 50. The CDC recommends that everyone 6 months of age or older get a

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flu vaccine every season with some rare exceptions for allergies, she adds.

“Get your shot by the end of October because it takes a couple of weeks for those antibodies to develop in the body to provide protection against the flu,” Creighton says. “It’s beneficial to get it early — September or October — but even if you get it later, it’s better than not getting it all.”

The flu vaccine still is the best defense against getting influenza, even within the context of physically distanced and masked lifestyles, says Creighton.

“The flu is a completely different virus and the flu vaccine is relevant,” Creighton says. “When the holidays come, we’ll be living this lifestyle where we’re touching surfaces and going out. If you’re in the older age bracket, wanting to see grandkids under the age of two, quarantine yourself for a couple of weeks before coming together to decrease COVID-19 or flu risk.”

Prevent Pneumonia in Young and Old

By JAKE TRAYLOR

Both the very young and the very old are susceptible to pneumonia, cautions Creighton. An infection of the lungs, pneumonia can cause mild to severe illness in people of all ages, though infants under the age of 2 and people 65+ are the most vulnerable age groups. Other groups at risk from pneumonia include anyone with a chronic health disease, explains Creighton. Diabetes, heart disease, lung disease, liver disease, or kidney disease put people at risk and cigarettes and excessive alcohol affect the liver and the lungs, making smokers and heavy drinkers also more susceptible to contracting pneumonia, adds Creighton.

Two vaccines help prevent pneumonia, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. For children younger than 2 years of age, and those who are 2 years or older with certain medical conditions, the CDC recommends PCV13.

For adults 65 years or older, everyone ages 2 to 64 years old with certain medical conditions, and adults ages 19 to 64 years old who smoke cigarettes, the PPSV23 pneumonia vaccine is recommended by the CDC.

Creighton says people are more concerned with the health of their bodies than ever before, and this can lead to information that isn’t always correct.

“Research has, to my knowledge, shown that there is no risk for severe complications of these vaccines,” says Creighton. “It all comes down to the right source.

Look for science-based information at [CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov), [NIH.gov](https://www.nih.gov), and local health departments and physicians, explains Creighton. She also recommends foregoing the sites focused on “he said/she said” forms of communication.

Other ways to prevent pneumonia, in addition to getting the vaccine, are washing hands often, quitting smoking, and keeping the immune system strong with regular physical activity and eating healthy, according to the National Institute of Health.

STEP 3: FINANCIAL HEALTH

Early Planning Keeps Finances Healthy

By LYDIA HILL

Just like staying vaccinated or eating right, taking care of personal finances plays an important role in healthy aging. Although there is no vaccine for the pocketbook, there are many ways people can ensure financial health as they age, says Marcia Ory, Ph.D., MPH, and founding director of the Texas A&M Health Center for Population Health and Aging. Measures such as budgeting, saving, and planning for long-term care are important steps for people ages 50 and up, advises Ory, who is also a Regents and Distinguished professor at the Texas A&M School of Public Health.

Most Americans earn the most between the ages of 45 to 54 and can use this time to pay off debt, according to the AARP.

Reviewing the budget annually, Ory adds, is key to avoiding additional debt.

“It’s never too late to try to imagine what your budget is and to see how you might live within your means,” she adds.

In their 50s, people should save as much as they can for retirement, according to the AARP. At age 50, increase contributions to 401(k)s and other retirement accounts, according to a retirement toolkit published by the U.S. Department of Labor, the Social Security Administration, and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

Between the ages of 62 and 67, people begin qualifying for Social Security benefits, but the monthly benefit will increase if benefits claims are delayed until closer to age 70, according to the toolkit.

People should not rely solely on Social Security to cover costs in retirement, Ory says. “That idea that Social Security is going to enable you to live to your same standard of living probably isn’t true,” she explains.

Planning should include long-term care, Ory adds, noting that nursing homes can

cost more than \$90,000 per year. Because long-term care insurance is less expensive the earlier it is purchased, people should proactively examine their future care needs in their 50s, she says.

As average life expectancy increases, many people experience health conditions that make it difficult for family members to provide care.

“One needs to be realistic about finances and what you’re going to need, both in terms of long-term care and who you can count on to help you,” Ory explains. “The reality is families bear the burden of long-term care.”

Like any other area of health, this long-term view is key to any financial checklist, Ory adds.

“Reevaluate what’s important to you, particularly about how you’re going to spend money,” she says. “Think about not just living tomorrow, but think about the long haul.”

Financial Health Includes Having A Will

By NOAH CEBALLOS

Every decade of life adds more responsibilities to take care of for financial health, but at age 50, it turns into more of an evaluation of overall financial health.

People often think about physical or mental health when they talk about healthy aging, says Ory. Financial health is just as important in an older population.

Do you have a will? is one of the first questions to ask yourself for a financial checkup, according to the AARP.

“It is really important to have a will,” says Ory. It is especially important at age 50, but it is important regardless of age. There are many different ways to go about producing a will, says Ory, depending on a person’s financial situation. Oftentimes, a lawyer is consulted to set up a will, but prices can vary, Ory says. There are templates online to create a will, but Ory cautions to make sure to use a template for the correct state and pay close attention to the rules on how to sign the documents.

For those who are younger and are trying to assist parents or grandparents, Ory is emphatic to not tell someone age 50+ what they need to do.

“Just like a teen, or somebody in their twenties, they are going to shut down,” says Ory. “Imagine how you would want to be talked to — that is the secret of success.”

For financial tips for every age, visit the AARP website. [i](https://www.aarp.org)

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MONEY MATTERS

Slow and Steady Wins the Investment Race

Courtesy of **EXTRACO BANKS**

Clients often ask about the best approach to investing, particularly during such interesting times, and Extraco encourages forming an investment philosophy and sticking to it for the long term.

One can take comfort in compelling data showing that periods of market downturn tend to be followed by periods

of recovery that reward patient, long-term investors. Regardless of the crises causing a drop in markets, the numbers speak for themselves. Sticking with your investment plan helps put you in the best position to capture the recovery and beyond.

Sudden market downturns of 10% to 20% can be unsettling. However, US equity

returns are historically positive following these events. A broad market index tracking US data since 1926 shows stocks have generally delivered strong returns over one-, three-, and five-year periods following steep declines. In fact, these tend to even be higher than the long-term average of 9.6%.

Stock returns are volatile, but nearly a century of bull and bear markets shows that the good times have outshined the bad times.

From 1926 through March 31, 2020, the S&P 500 Index experienced 17 bear markets, or a fall of at least 20% from a previous peak. The declines ranged from -21% to -80% across an average length of around 10 months.

On the upside, there were 17 bull markets, or gains of at least 20% from a previous trough. They averaged 56 months in length, and advances ranged from 21% to 936%.

Staying invested and focused on the long term helps to ensure you're in a position to capture what the market offers. When the bull and bear markets are viewed together, it is clear equities have rewarded disciplined investors. Some might be tempted to "time the market" in an attempt to avoid the bad days and capture the good days. The impact of missing just a few of the market's best days can be profound. There is no proven way to time the market by targeting the best days or moving to the sidelines to avoid the worst. History argues for staying put through good times and bad.

Since 1926, the US stock market, as measured by the S&P 500 index, has rewarded investors with an average annual return of about 10%. But it's important to remember that returns in any given year may be sky-high, extremely poor, or somewhere in between.

In conclusion, the stock market's ups and downs are unpredictable, but history supports an expectation of positive returns over the long term. The best investment plan is to have one and to stay the course. **i**

Source of market data: Dimensional Fund Advisors LP

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HEALTHY AGING

Pandemic Best Practices for Senior Adults

By LAUREN ROUSE



As the world continues to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic—more than six months and counting—older adults and caregivers have had to adapt to a variety of measures to keep themselves and others safe from catching the virus. As flu season approaches, it is even more imperative to understand how older adults and their caregivers can better cope with the pandemic and protect themselves from illness.

While physical-distancing measures are meant to keep older adults safe from contracting COVID-19, they have also presented the added stressors of making people feel isolated and lonely. Stress and anxiety can often manifest during infectious disease outbreaks, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

“Social isolation is becoming intensified and complicated during the COVID-19 pandemic,” says Matthew Lee Smith, PhD, MPH, CHES, co-director of the Center for Population Health

[continued on page 40]

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

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and Aging. "While the required physical isolation provides protection against the virus, social isolation has a range of negative consequences that may be amplified by the stress and uncertainty of the contemporary reality."

However, positive actions can help manage the stress and anxiety in ways that are beneficial for older adults and their caregivers. Taking breaks from watching the news; taking care of your body both physically, nutritionally, and mentally; and making time to unwind and connect with others are healthy ways to cope with stressors, according to the CDC.

"More than ever, it is important that people of all ages take the time to connect," says Marcia G. Ory, PhD, MPH, founding director of the Texas A&M University Center for Population Health and Aging. "Sharing experience [and] knowledge through things like volunteer opportunities enriches the lives of all involved." Connecting with others can take the form of video calls, phone calls, and even written letters. Share your life story with your grandkids; tutor a student while their parents are working; start a virtual book club.

Smith adds that connecting with family and friends is important, but it is equally or more important to have meaningful interactions.

"Try to understand the situations and circumstances of others, attempt to recognize their needs, and see what you can do to make older adults feel supported and valued," Smith says. "Be welcoming, ask questions, and listen."

Yet, as businesses and communities begin to open and stay-at-home orders are lifted, older adults and their caregivers are faced with the realities of how to keep safe while maintaining a sense of normalcy. AARP outlines processes that are helpful for guiding older adults and their caregivers toward informed decisions.

Foremost, talk with your health care professionals about what is safe for you and the person under your care. Caretakers often have to remember that their decisions not only affect themselves, but those in their care. Second, weigh the risks and benefits and take time to consider all the options; don't feel rushed into making decisions that can affect health and wellbeing for both caregivers and care recipients. Third, talk with your family and use them as a sounding board.

They may be able to provide additional ideas or solutions to stay connected or venture out safely. Finally, be flexible. With information changing daily, and restrictions being updated or lifted, being able to adapt quickly and problem solve creatively is a sign of a good caretaker.

There are a number of frequently updated resources out there covering a number of topics from organizations like the Administration for Community Living and the National Council on Aging that can support decision-making.

"Adaptability is key in caregiving, especially during a pandemic, but you don't have to make decisions alone," Ory says. "Be sure to ask for help and know where you can find reliable resources."

This commentary is brought to you by the Texas A&M Center for Population Health and Aging. The center strives to bring together stakeholders and partners from the community, clinical, and corporate sectors to address the needs of older adults. Working together, CPHA's mission is to keep Texans "Active for Life®...Every one! Every age! Every day!"

For more information about CPHA, visit cpa.tamhsc.edu. **i**



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SECOND ANNUAL BRAZOS VALLEY GIVES

Give Where You Live

By KATIE JAMES



Nonprofits have helped so many people in the community this past year; now it's time to help them in return. Brazos Valley Gives is back this year on Oct. 27 and is expanding to all seven counties of the Brazos Valley.

Powered by the Community Foundation, Brazos Valley Gives is a single day of giving where anyone can be a philanthropist by donating to support their favorite local 501(c)(3) nonprofit, since the minimum donation is only \$10.


"So many nonprofits had to cancel their fundraisers this year," says Molly Watson, co-chair of Brazos Valley Gives. "We can fill in the gaps of events that were canceled."

This second-annual event, which will now be hosted the fourth Tuesday of every October, hopes to build on the momentum from its inaugural year where it raised \$363,686 plus more than \$25,000 in additional incentive gifts, says Watson.

"Last year was pretty incredible," says Watson. "879 donors were first-time donors to a nonprofit. The

community really came together to be really philanthropic."

This year, the goal is to raise \$375,000 and have 125 nonprofits participate from all over the Brazos Valley.

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BrazosValleyGives.org

"We're really fortunate that we're an online event," says Watson. "We're used to doing things online, so [COVID-19] doesn't really affect the event except that we hope people can still reach down deep. I think people are ready to support and get involved. It's an inclusive way all the community can be involved and meet the quality-of-life needs nonprofits provide."

To support, log on to **brazosvalleygives.org** from 5 a.m. to 11 p.m. on Oct. 27 and discover all the participating nonprofits. All gifts pass through directly to the nonprofits except for a 5.2% fee, which the donor can opt out of. Alternately, checks and cash can be dropped off at The Eagle or Brenham Chamber of Commerce on Oct. 27 from 7 a.m. until 7 p.m.

Early giving kicks off Oct. 1, and any donations made during the early giving period will count towards that charity's giving goal.

"St. Vincent de Paul raised the most money [last year] and had a particular project that they wanted donors to contribute to," says Watson.



“If you need equipment, have a unique program you want to put money behind, or have a particular need, that’s an easy way to rally donors.”

Brazos Valley Gives benefits nonprofits by giving them a platform and promotion, allowing all nonprofits to be supported regardless of size and funding. Watson hopes nonprofits will take advantage of the opportunity to get their supporters excited about fundraising.

“Days of giving provide cities and businesses platforms to support the nonprofits they love,” says Watson. “Brazos Valley Gives strengthens nonprofits, empowers donors, and builds community. Putting community first by giving where you live is critical to sustain our nonprofits.”

Individuals, businesses, and organizations interested in providing matching funds or a sponsorship

can contact Community Foundation President Patricia Gerling at brazosvalleygives@gmail.com for more information.

Though the Community Foundation powers Brazos Valley Gives, it is not a fundraiser for them as 100% of donations benefit participating nonprofits. Donors choose and give to the nonprofit of their choice.

“Brazos Valley Gives is our gift to the nonprofit community,” says Gerling. *i*

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BCS TOGETHER



Serving Children and Families Touched by Foster Care

By MADI TELSCHOW

One couple's vision, in just over a year, has blossomed into an impactful ministry to serve those touched by the child welfare system in Bryan College Station.

BCS Together, as of March 2019, originally existed as an event for anyone in the community interested in foster care, adoption, or supporting those involved. It was organized by Jenni Olowo and her husband, who were then two-time foster care parents. However, when personal journeys collided over coffee, the Olowos decided it might be time to increase their impact, transforming their event into a full-blown organization.

Although Jackie Kline did not realize what she was getting into when she first met Jenni, the now-communications director for BCS Together says she and her husband were ready to engage in the foster community.

"We weren't quite ready to become foster parents at that point, but we knew we wanted to get involved," says Kline. "Last August, Jenni started telling me about BCS Together and the vision that she and her husband had — but they were kind of at ground zero. They didn't have a team or anything, so she asked me if I would be interested. At that point, I was already sold."

Kline explains, while she was certainly an instigator for BCS Together's organizational beginnings, it was the addition of Jenny Closner, the now-

director of community resources, that got them up and running.

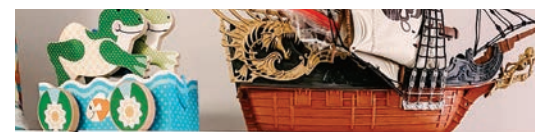
"We all worked together to turn BCS Together into what it is today, but it definitely started on the groundwork of what Jenny Closner had laid," says Kline. "Grace Bible Church had a ministry called Faithful to the Fatherless, and she kind of spearheaded that."

Kline explains, while Faithful to the Fatherless has now come under the BCS Together umbrella, their church partnerships have moved past Grace Bible Church, including another eight local fellowships. These nine churches collectively participate in the new CarePortal program, which incorporates online technology to connect churches with local needs.

Through this technology, implemented in March, Kline reports that BCS Together has been able to serve 155 kids, meet 121 requests, and have an over \$33 thousand impact.

"For many of us, we know these things are out there and happening, but we just don't know where it is or what to do about it, so this brings the need to people clearly," says Kline. "If only 10% of churches in each community within our country became engaged in the foster care and adoption space, we would have more than enough resources for every single child."

Kline acknowledges, although she and her husband were originally hesitant, her



time with BCS Together has inspired them to begin training to foster.

"You hear foster care, you kind of think of the horror stories that you might have heard, and you think, 'There's no way I'm cut out to do that,'" Kline explains. "But I have been able to befriend so many foster families and meet their kids, and my husband and I both are just like, 'Oh, they're normal kids who need a home and need a safe place and need someone who will love them.'"

In addition to overcoming her initial fear, Kline says she has come to recognize her own privilege and how much capacity she has — emotionally and financially — to care for a foster child.

"Seeing how heroic and brave the people that we serve are has really given me the courage to take the small sacrifice and step up and do something," says Kline. "They didn't ask for those situations, but they were put into those positions, and so me, being in my comfortable position, should really be empowered to do something about it."

Kline offers her own advice for couples who might be interested in foster care and have concerns of their own.

"Getting involved in the foster care community is really the best way to look into foster care," says Kline. "We have a mentorship program where we will partner you with a seasoned foster family, and they can kind of walk through the journey with you, show you the ups and downs, and give you resources." *i*

FACETS

Families of Autistic Children Engaged Together for Support

By KHADEEJA UMANA



Families of Autistic Children Engaged Together for Support is a Bryan College Station organization created in 2007 for the support of parents in the area who have children with autism. The organization offers resources, family and youth training, sibling support groups, and meals for its members, says Executive Director Aimee Ortiz-Day.

Ortiz-Day says she found out her son was autistic when he was a little over two years old. She found FACETS while searching for local support groups in the area to assist her. In 2011, she stepped in as the executive director when the previous director made the decision to have someone with younger children take over the organization.

"Through FACETS, families are able to build a community and find that network where they can reach out to each other for support," says Meagan Orsag, associate director for the Center on Disability and Development at



Texas A&M University. "They have a place where they can come to learn about best practice."

FACETS collaborates with other organizations like the Down Syndrome Association of Brazos Valley, both the B/CS school districts, the Brazos Center for Independent Living, and the Center on Disability and Development at Texas A&M for events like the monthly family training event, called Purposeful Life, Ortiz-Day says.

"Aimee has been a strong and important current advocate in our community but also across the state," Orsag says. "She has been

encouraging the police force, our first responders, and our camp counselors to learn more about how they can best support children with disabilities and their families. She's done a wonderful job at connecting the center with our community."

Orsag says anyone looking for more information or resources can visit the Texas A&M Center on Disability and Development website, cdd.tamu.edu, and reach out to specialists from any of the programs they offer.

"We as a center are seen as a connection between what's happening in the policy world, the university world, and what's happening

in regard to research," Orsag says. "We are able to help our communities connect to those research policies, the university standards, or best practice. We do a really great job of listening to our community and what their needs are. We then base our work on what their needs are, so the more interaction with our community the better — we welcome it."

Accepting your child's gifts and challenges is the first step to finding the right resources, Ortiz-Day says. The challenges autistic children have in their life are not because they have autism but because our world is not created to support autistic people in the ways they need to be supported, she says.

"One of the important topics we discuss is safety in the community," Ortiz-Day says. "The children are in a room where they learn about police officers and firefighters and also learn about different strategies they can use to be safe when they are out

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in the community. We also provide training for police officers and teach them how to support autistic children in emergency situations."

The sibling support groups are one of the programs facilitated by Texas A&M students, Ortiz-Day says.

"The sibling support groups help children learn how to advocate for their siblings, but they also allow a space for them to learn

from each other about what it means to have a sibling with a disability," Ortiz-Day says. "Sometimes that can be something that is a little bit challenging. So that's basically for them to speak to one another and share those feelings."

Families that are new to the community are able to meet with Ortiz-Day one-on-one and gather resources, learn from other parents, and attend conferences that give them the information they need to advocate for their children, says Ortiz-Day.

"Looking at professional resources is the best way to support your child as a parent," Ortiz-Day says. "To look for additional information about resources like webinars or any local therapy that is provided in the area, you can visit our website at facetsbcs.org, or reach out at facetsbcs@gmail.com." *i*

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